

Chapter One:

This is going to be tricky

I was a twenty-something, and only a year or two into my life as a Christian. We were having lunch in a restaurant in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and I sat across from my prospective employer, in the final interview for what was to be my first full time professional selling situation. During the interview process, I had learned from the sales recruiter with whom I was working that the previous salesperson, the one I would be replacing if I got the job, had been fired for lying on his call reports. The company, I believed, had acted in a way that indicated that honesty and integrity were important to them.

That fit perfectly with my newfound Christian ethics, and I wanted to appeal to that value in them. So, I mentioned that I was a “born-again Christian,” and could be counted on to be honest. The interview ended with no job offer. Later that week, the sales recruiter indicated that my comment had frightened my prospective employer. He had been prepared to offer me the job, and had changed his mind at the last minute.

What if I used my job to proselytize the customers? I wasn’t being hired to be a missionary, providing my testimony to every customer, I was being hired to sell his products.

On the prodding of the recruiter, we went back and forth a few times, and I was able to convince the sales manager that I would not try to proselytize my customers nor loudly proclaim my Christianity, but would be directed internally by its values.

The Heart of a Christian Sales Person

Copy Right MMXIV By Dave Kahle

All Rights Reserved

I got the job, and so was introduced to the conflicts of being a Christian salesperson. This, I thought – being a Christian salesperson -- is going to be tricky.

Being a Christian salesperson is going to be tricky!
--

This was to be my first really professional sales position. But, I wasn't new to selling. As a college student, I found a summer job working for the Jewel Team Company.

A national company headquartered in the Chicago area, they eventually morphed into the chain of Jewel grocery stores that have come to dominate the Chicago area.

At the time, they sold groceries and household items to housewives from little panel trucks. The housewife would sign up for the service, and the Jewel Tea route salesperson would show up every two weeks, deliver the order from the last time, and take an order for delivery the next time. The route salespeople were checked onto their routes, and ran them like independent businesses. There were thousands of routes around the country.

I was one of hundreds of college students hired around the country to operate the route while the salesperson was on vacation.

Each route had a storage area – typically a garage, lined with shelves. Once a week, the truck from headquarters would disgorge the week's orders, and the salesperson would spend an evening organizing them.

Then, each day, we would load up the orders for that day, plus some "impulse items" like bags of candy or cookies, and head out for that day's route.

At each stop, we'd fill an aluminum basket with the items to be delivered -- the displays and marketing pieces for that round of calls, and a few of the impulse items.

The sales call began with a delivery of the order, proceeded to showing the displays for things like back to school clothes, or cookware. Then, there was always a large card with the groceries specials on it, from which we'd try to garner an order. Finally, we'd suggest a couple of the impulse items, write everything up on an order pad for the next visit, collect the money, and be on our way to the next customer.

I loved it. Not only did it feel good to be in charge of my own day, but I enjoyed the interaction with the customers, and, for the first time, felt the "high" that comes when someone says, "Yes." The impact of my efforts was measurable, and could be added up in dollars of sales.

And, amazingly, I would consistently sell more in my two weeks on the route than the regular salesperson did. I was dumbfounded. How could that be? I just did what they told me to do. Didn't everybody do that?

This was to become the foundation for my conviction, which is central to my work as a sales educator and sales trainer: That there are best practices in the profession of sales, and to excel at the job, you need to do what the best do.

There are best practices in the profession of sales, and to excel at the job, you need to do what the best do.
--

That sounds so common sense so as, on first glance, to hardly even warrant saying. But, over the next four decades, I was to discover that the overwhelming majority of salespeople don't bother to study or implement the best practices of their profession.

In my position as a route salesperson, I took the time to fill the basket before each sales call, so I always had something to sell, and always had something to talk about. A simple thing – a thing my bosses told me to do – but it set me apart from the older and more experienced sales people who didn't bother.

I did so well in that summer job that the company said that anytime I wanted to work, over Christmas or Spring break, for example, they would find something for me to do. I took them up on it, and spent my Christmas and

The Heart of a Christian Sales Person

Copy Right MMXIV By Dave Kahle

All Rights Reserved

Easter breaks working vacant routes. The second summer, they checked me onto a vacant route, and in the short ten weeks that I was there, I brought it up to a level with the best performing routes in the area.

That earned me a small scholarship as the best summer employee within the district, and a trip to Barrington, Illinois with other summer winners for an overnight visit to the headquarters and a steak barbeque with the president of the company! At 19 years old, it didn't get much better than that.

I began to see the perks that come with excelling at sales: more influence with the company, prospering financially, and special perks reserved for only the best. I began to culture a taste for the profession of sales.

But I had greater financial needs than could be met by just a summer job. So, I found a job during the school year selling men's clothing in B.R. Bakers, an expensive men's clothing store.

It was typical retail store in what was then the exclusive shopping area in Toledo, Ohio. The casual clothes and furnishings (shirts & ties) were displayed in the front of the store, and the big ticket items -- suits, sport coats and dress slacks -- in the back. The job paid an hourly wage, plus a commission. The older more experienced employees sold the big ticket items, and the younger, part time help was relegated to the front of the store.

But, staffing requirements didn't always work out that way, and I soon transitioned to selling the more expensive suits and sport coats. Once again, I found exceptional success. I probably averaged about 30 – 40 hours per week, and consistently outsold everyone in all the branches. My sales were only exceeded by a couple of the real pros who operated out of our well-established downtown headquarters.

I really was at a loss to explain my success. I learned from my boss, and picked up tips from the buyers and manufacturer representatives who would visit from time to time. Once again, it was a matter of doing what my bosses told me to do, and then enhancing those "best practices" with others I gained along the way. I couldn't understand why I was more successful than most others. It really wasn't that difficult.

I'd greet the customer and try to find something to comment on or compliment, so that I'd begin a conversation with the customer. The other salespeople were satisfied using the old standard, "Can I help you?"

When it was clear that the customer was looking for a suit, sport coat, or other expensive item, I'd walk them back to their size on the rack, select something I thought they might like, and ask them to put it on just to check the size. I'd let them look through the selection and often would make a suggestion or two. If things went well, we'd have 3 – 4 possibilities identified.

I'd hang them on a separate rack, and focus the customer's attention on choosing among them. Often enough, the customer would elect to buy one of those suits. It just seemed so simple.

Again, I tasted the special benefits that come with being good at sales. I made more money than almost everyone else. When Oleg Cassini, a world famous clothing designer, came to town, I was selected to join him and the company executives at a cocktail party. Since I was seen as an asset to the company, I could set my own hours, and had first crack at the prime times on the schedule.

I enjoyed the money, the perks, and the feeling of success that came with that job, and continued working their part-time after I graduated.

It was in this period of time that I became a Christian. I came from a strong Catholic family, and attended Catholic elementary and high schools. But, I was always a bit of free thinker, and had a dose of independent, maverick spirit, so I soon grew disenchanted with the rules, regulations and rigid hierarchy of that institution, and left it, mentally, in my teen years.

For the next few years, I think I passed through every mental landscape through which a seeker could journey: Zen, Buddhism, Anosticism, Athiesm, and strident humanism. But I saw faults with every one of these "isms", and felt a yearning inside – something missing – that none of these philosophies could fill. It was then that someone handed me *"The Late, Great Planet Earth,"* the famous book by Hal Lindsey.

The Heart of a Christian Sales Person

Copy Right MMXIV By Dave Kahle

All Rights Reserved

His graphic descriptions of the last days shook me like nothing else in my life, and I soon found myself studying the Bible one-on-one with a minister.

Shortly thereafter, I made a commitment to Christ, and, at age 22, was baptized.

A year or so later, still in the emotional and spiritual rush of my recent conversion, I found myself sitting across from my future manager at lunch in Ann Arbor.